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ABSTRACT

As part of a UNESCO-sponsored series of studies examining how integrated and coordinated early childhood policies are implemented, this case study focuses on Senegal's integrated early childhood policy. The case study examines the context for policy development and analyzes the structure and resources of the Ministry for the Family and Early Childhood (MFPE). Also examined are the goals and strategies of the new policy, the program's feasibility and relevance, and issues related to access, quality, and equity. The study draws on four data types, including document analysis, interviews, and observations of integrated and traditional preschool centers. At the center of the policy is the model of the children's hut, that considers the complexity of the African situation and tensions between tradition and modernity, offering an early childhood support program providing education, health, and nutrition services. The study concludes that the new Senegalese policy draws on the potential of the nonformal sector to resolve problems faced by formal and informal preschool education as well as health and nutrition services. It is noted that the proposed model is considerably removed from the inexpensive, grassroots approaches previously tried and does not necessarily seem the most relevant in terms of declared ambitions regarding access and quality. Among the positive features is the presence at the MFPE of those involved in inter-ministerial approaches and actively advocating preschool innovation. The study asserts that time will be needed for a new, shared vision to take shape, and regular meetings devoted to shared projects are needed; the policy's success is dependent on balanced joint construction backed by authentic action research and self-assessment. (Contains 57 references.) (KB)

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Implementation of the Integrated Early Childhood Policy in Senegal

Sylvie Rayna,
CRESAS, Institut National de Recherche Pédagogique (Paris, France)

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U N E S C O

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List of acronyms

CNC	*Centre de Nutrition Communautaire*
CMNDIPE	*Comité Multisectoriel National de Développement Intégré de la Petite Enfance*
CRESP	Centre of Resources for the Emergence of Social Participation
DEPEE	*Direction de l'Éducation Préscolaire et Élémentaire*
DEPS	*Division de l'Éducation Préscolaire (de la DEPEE du Ministère de l'Éducation)*, subsequently *Direction de l'Éducation Préscolaire (du MFPE)*
DIPE	*Développement Intégré de la Petite Enfance*
DF	*Direction de la Famille*
DPE	*Développement de la Petite Enfance*
DPE-DE	*Direction de la Petite Enfance et des Droits de l'Enfant*
DEPRE	*Direction de La Planification et de la Réforme de l'Éducation*
EFI	*École de Formation des Instituteurs*
FICEMEA	International Federation of Training Centres for the Promotion of Progressive Education
INEADE	*Institut National d'Étude et d'Action pour le Développement de l'Éducation*
MFASSN	*Ministère de la Famille, de l'Action Sociale et de la Solidarité Nationale*
MFPE	*Ministère de la Famille et de la Petite Enfance*
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
ORT/SEN	*Organisation-Reconstruction-Travail/Santé-Éducation-Nutrition*
PAGF	*Projet d'Appui aux Groupements de Promotion Féminine*
PDEF	*Plan Décennal de l'Éducation et de la Formation*
RAFPE	*Réseau Africain Francophone de la Petite Enfance*
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

Implementation of the Integrated Early Childhood Policy in Senegal

I Introduction

The recent comparative examination of welfare policies for young children carried out by the OECD (2001) called attention to the overall circumstances necessary for equitable access to proper facilities. The first of these was an integrated approach calling for a clear vision of early childhood and the establishment, at both central and decentralized level, of an effective system of cooperation between a selected ministry and other ministerial bodies in working towards a coherent, participatory policy. In the light of recent changes observed in other countries such as Sweden (Gunnarsson, Martin Korp & Nordenstam, 1999; OECD, 2000b), and the United Kingdom (Bertram & Pascal, 1999; OECD, 2000 c), the report stresses the importance of a strong, equal partnership with the education system.

As part of the UNESCO programme *Ministerial Auspices and financing for early childhood: Development of an action plan*, a series of case studies has been undertaken relating to integrated and coordinated early childhood policies. The intention is to obtain a more detailed analysis of how these policies have so far been drawn up and found concrete expression in the specific cultural and socio-economic contexts of countries already committed to, or preparing to embark on, this approach; and more particularly to gain a deeper, more differentiated acquaintance with integration and coordination mechanisms. The goal was information that would not only help the countries concerned improve their integrated systems, but would also be of benefit to those developing or developed countries that have not yet taken concrete steps in this direction but are currently considering the possibility.

1.1. Integrated early childhood policy in Senegal

Senegal, a Sahelian country, appears in this series of studies because of its decision to entrust early childhood to a new ministry, the Ministry for the Family and Early Childhood (MFPE). Acknowledging the critical situation of young Senegalese children in terms of health, nutrition and education, the new Government established Early Childhood Development (DPE) as a priority in 2000, and a year later created the new ministry responsible for drawing up and implementing an ambitious integrated policy. Thus this developing country opted for ministerial supervision independent of education, as in Norway, but unlike the system in Sweden and New Zealand.

It should be briefly pointed out that Senegal, a former French colony, became independent in 1960 and is now among the most thoroughly democratised African countries. A republic, it was led for 20 years by President Léopold Sédar Senghor and for a further 10 years by his successor, Abdou Diouf. The ruling Socialist Party was supplanted by the liberal Senegalese Democratic Party, created in 1974 by Abdoulaye Wade, who was elected President in 2000. Administratively, Senegal is composed of 10 regions. It has a population of 9 million, 66% of whom are under the age of 24. Senegal is a secular country whose Constitution recognizes freedom of religion. The majority (94%) of its inhabitants are Muslims, but certain groups have retained animist practices. It is home to a number of ethnic groups, the largest being Wolof and the others including Fulani, Serer, Diola and Mandingo. The most widely spoken national language is Wolof, the official language being French. Often described as torn between modernity and tradition, Senegal is currently experiencing economic and social difficulties – exacerbated by the impact of globalisation and poor rainfall – which structural adjustment measures dating from the 1980s have failed to check and which are leading to an increasingly pronounced free-market approach (Devey, 2000).

Prior to Abdoulaye Wade's presidency, early childhood was not a priority, the pre-school sector being the education system's poor relation. Education underwent a

major crisis in the 1980s and reacted with an emphasis on primary schooling which marginalized pre-school education (Diouf, Mbaye & Nachtman, 2001). Nonetheless, the latter became a significant issue in the country's economic and social development in the late 1990s: with the launching of the anti-poverty campaign in 1998, it became the third facet of the *Ten Year Education and Training Plan* (PDEF) financed by the World Bank, the other two facets being primary schooling and adult literacy. The Ministry of Education's Pre-school and Primary Education Department (DEPEE) played a considerable role here, the aim being to expand access to education for the 2-6 age group from 2.7% in 1998 to 30% by 2010; quality was also scheduled to improve, via promotion of the community sector, seen as less expensive and more appropriate, and an integrated approach. At the instigation of the DEPEE, an inter-ministerial committee was set up that included representatives from the Education, Family, Health, Literacy and other sectors. Studies jointly commissioned by the then Ministries of Education and the Family were carried out in 1999. They inventoried current health, nutrition and education care for young children, calculated available resources – evaluation of recent community experiences, listing of traditional games, etc. – and made recommendations. The PDEF's *Integrated Early Childhood Development* programme (DIPE) makes provision for testing (not yet begun) of integrated centres within certain structures: community day nurseries, pre-school classes in primary schools, community food distribution centres and the play facilities provided by an NGO.

Under President Wade, who based his campaign on sectors neglected by his predecessors, early childhood began to be foregrounded in 2000 and was given a high profile by the creation of its own ministry in 2001. At Presidential instigation, a new model emerged, focused on children aged 0-6 years: the President himself had designed the model and shown strong personal commitment to building of 28,000 "children's huts" throughout the country by 2010. The new model was intended to spread its influence to the sector as a whole and was then incorporated into the PDEF's DIPE programme, with the hut now one of the various integrated early childhood centres to be tested.

1.2. Study aims and method

I propose to begin this study by detailing the reasons that led Senegal to opt for this integrated policy, the context of the decision and the reasons for the choice. I shall then analyse the present structure of the new ministry (MFPE), its scope, its resources and the relevant intra- and inter-ministerial coordination structures and mechanisms. Next, I shall examine the goals and strategies of the new policy and analyse the projects on which the MFPE has already begun working. In conclusion, I shall consider the feasibility and relevance of the planned programme in the light of concrete progress and specific prospects, and discuss the issues and challenges in terms of access, quality and equity.

The study draws on four types of data: (1) documentary research (ministerial documents, reports, articles of various kinds, general literature; (2) interviews in France with resource persons and involved actors; (3) interviews in Senegal – during a ten-day visit in January-February 2002 – with decision-makers and actors involved in the new policy (senior ministerial staff, national and international NGOs, educators, inspectors, training personnel, researchers); and (4) observation of work and integrated centres, together with visits to conventional pre-school structures in Dakar and Thiès.

By cross-referencing these data, the study offers a provisional analysis of a situation rendered difficult to grasp by its still embryonic, shifting character. We are at present witnessing the initial implementation phase of a new policy prepared over the last few months on the basis of successive versions of different texts. I was given access to some of these documents, still in the course of preparation, during my visit. I hope nonetheless that this "still frame" approach will convey an initial assessment of the current process.

2. Early childhood in Senegal

The policy initiated by President Wade signals a major change of direction in relation to the past, for it makes early childhood a national priority. At the same time, the decision reflects local history and a favourable international and regional context. Thus my intention in presenting early childhood in Senegal in this section is to fill in the background to the new policy; I shall begin with a brief account of its relationship with contemporary international and regional events.

2.1. Early childhood: the international and regional context (1990 - 2000)

2.1.1. Rights of the Child, Education for All and a new paradigm for pre-school education

The year 1989, that of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, left its mark on the 1990s, which saw the adoption by a steadily increasing number of countries of universal principles relating to child protection and early childhood education from birth (Combes, 2000, a). Senegal signed the Convention as early as 1990, the year of the Jomtien World Declaration on Education for All, to which Senegal also became an immediate signatory. It likewise signed in 1990 the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which stresses the importance of the traditions and cultural values of individual countries. In the National Plan of Action for Children, drawn up in Senegal in 1991 by the Ministry of the Family, mention is made of early childhood and its rights, and the importance of toys is emphasized.

Generally speaking, during this period changes can be seen in the representation of early childhood welfare. One feature is a growing interest in non-formal education, notably in the developing countries where parents and communities now tend to be seen, not as targets, but as partners in their own right (Myers, 1992; Dembelé, 1999; Evans, 1999; Leon & Ball, 2000). The UNESCO model itself has changed, moving from that of the conventional nursery school towards that of integrated education programmes for the child and the family, programmes that take account of the many interactive circles in which the child moves (Bennett, 1999 a, b; Combes, 2000, b). More generally, a new paradigm for pre-school education emerged, calling the dominant Western models into question and fuelling international debate on the concept of quality, with the latter coming to be seen as a subjective, relative notion requiring the points of view of all concerned (Moss & Pence, 1994; Moss, 1996; Moss, Dahlberg & Pence, 2000; Woodhead, 1996). Complexity, diversity and relativism were at the core of the new approach, the ultimate goal and point of consensus being the Rights of the Child.

Ten years after Jomtien, the World Education Forum held in Dakar in May 2000 summed up what had been done in the course of the decade and closed with the adoption of a Framework for Action for the years ahead. It reaffirmed the vision expressed in the Jomtien Declaration, and the participating countries undertook to work on their national plans with a view to realizing the aims and objectives of Education for All by 2015 at the latest. Early childhood was a notable priority here. Held just after Senegal's presidential elections, the Forum served as a useful platform for President Wade, who used it to officialise the priority that early childhood was henceforth to receive in his country.

2.1.2. Early childhood in French-speaking Africa: new aspects

An examination of early childhood in Africa's French-speaking countries, where the health and education situation is universally critical, reveals a focus on working on and with the family; there is also an increasing awareness on the part of governments of the need to extend pre-school education so as to protect children, improve health and promote education for girls (UNESCO, 1999). It is gradually coming to be realized that increased access necessarily means enhancing traditional childminding practices.

Mention should be made here of the impetus and direction that the UNESCO-FICEMEA partnership is going to generate in these countries on the basis of the

following ideas for action: (1) meeting the child's educational and health needs through appropriate intervention by professionals and the family (Poli & Varier, 1999); (2) a comprehensive mother-child-family and nutrition-health-education approach that takes account of parental living conditions and skills; and (3) interdisciplinary cooperation. The Seminar organized in Ouagadougou in 1996 (UNESCO-FICEMEA, 1997) led to the creation of a French-speaking African Network for Early Childhood (RAFPE), of which Senegal was to become a member. It was in this context that there developed the inexpensive "Clos d'enfants" model (Poli, 2000), which was tabled at the following Seminar in Bamako in 1998. The case of the first such Clos, in Mali, was examined with a view to widespread creation of others. The model places less emphasis on construction than on organisation and functioning: mobilization and training of mothers, organization of small groups of children and designing of various activities in a context of active teaching. It was being developed in several countries in the region, but not at the time in Senegal, even though it seemed similar to community experiments in which the Ministry of Education had been taking an interest since 1995.

The next Seminar took place in Dakar in the autumn of 2001, by which time the Senegalese Government had changed and the MFPE been set up. The aim of the Seminar was to sum up the various innovative experiments in the 14 RAFPE countries and identify the preconditions for maximizing a given structure's chances of meeting the needs of children aged 3-7 and being more generally applied within the limits of available resources. On that occasion, Senegal acknowledged the importance of mobilizing women for the cause of putting early childhood welfare within general reach and providing access for the most disadvantaged children; it also gave a solemn undertaking to set about creating an RAFPE unit in Senegal and presented the Presidential model of the children's hut as an innovation symbolizing the country's "unshakeable" political will in the early childhood field.

2.2. Health care and education for young children in Senegal

While radically new, the early childhood policy was an extension of the ideas already taking shape in the country in the late 1990s. In 1999, the *Study for Early Childhood Development* in Senegal, the work of an interdisciplinary team, described the disquieting situation of young children in matters of health, nutrition and education, and recommended the creation of *"versatile, low-cost structures appropriate to community needs"*. In the Ministry of Education documents, the PDEF early childhood section (1998-2008), drawn up in a spirit of optimisation of existing facilities with a view to taking in more children, aims at meeting all their needs by creating – especially in disadvantaged areas – centres integrated into existing structures which themselves are to be rehabilitated. At present, the PDEF's DIPE component is entrusted to the MFPE and the children's hut, which is in fact the prototype of the integrated centre, has been added to the programme.

2.2.1. The health and nutrition situation

The 1999 overview describes malnutrition as a real public health problem and at the root of 30% of all paediatric hospitalisations. Mentioned in particular are shortfalls in proteins, iron, vitamin A and iodine. Chronic malnutrition is estimated at 19%. The most dangerous illnesses are malaria, diarrhoea, respiratory infections, measles and HIV/AIDS. Subsequent texts look into this overview in greater detail. In a context where health conditions are difficult overall – only 38% of households have sanitation and 67% have access to running water – the task is to reduce child mortality and increase vaccination rates.

In the new policy's blueprint document – the Strategic Orientation Document (final version, February 2002) – the overview is extended and brought up to date. Child mortality is shown as higher in rural than in urban areas and varies according to the mother's educational level: the rates are 70 per thousand for the 0-1 age group, 81 per thousand for the 1-4 age group and 145 per thousand for the 4-15 age group. The

overall rate is said to have risen by 18% between 1995 and 2000. The main causes of child mortality are respiratory infections, malaria, measles, malnutrition and diarrhoea.

In respect of nutrition, the situation is fraught with problems. Weight shortfall among 0-6 year-olds is said to have dropped from 22.3% in 1996 to 18.4% in 2000. Severe malnutrition fell between 1992 and 1996 (from 8.7% to 6.7%) but had risen to 8.3% by 2000. Weight shortfall is more marked in rural than in urban areas (20.5% as against 13.2%) and correlates with the educational level of the mother: 19.3% where the mother has no education, 11% where the mother has reached secondary level. The height gap has narrowed (23% in 1996, 19% in 2000), but is more marked among boys (20%) than girls (17.1%). While WHO advocates breastfeeding exclusively during the first 4-6 months of life, followed by breastfeeding combined with food supplements until age 2, surveys indicate that exclusive breastfeeding for the 0-4 month group was running at only 23.5% in 2000, even if this represented a rise from the 9% noted in 1996.

2.2.2. The traditional approach to early childhood

In educational terms, the situation – as repeatedly emphasized by successive overviews – leaves much to be desired. Before analysing it I should like to outline the traditional approach to early childhood in Senegal, the difficulties it faces because of the profound changes the country is undergoing and the innovations it is generating.

2.2.2.1. Change and the family in Senegal

The traditional family is *an extended family*, living on a large plot of land. During the first year or two the child is breastfed by its mother, who takes it with her to the fields or puts it in the care of older people. The family and, to a certain extent, the entire community is responsible for caring for the child, especially since the women, whose work is much respected, are more and more involved in different kinds of activity. Growing children play together and are initiated into a social life characterized by clearly defined relationships among individual members. *"In this kind of setting it was all but unimaginable that a child should be thrown back on its own resources, especially when very young. The child or, more accurately, the group of children had enough space and freedom to imagine, create, make and imitate in all domains"* (Some, 1997, p.25). This is no longer the case, with several studies indicating that there is less attention to the care and education of small children. Children are often described as being left to their own devices in increasingly dangerous urban spaces from which traditional games are disappearing. Given the lack of care facilities and the break-up of the nuclear family, the youngest children are often entrusted to daughters, who are thus prevented from going to school.

2.2.2.2. Traditional day care centres

Alongside and rooted in traditional family care there has sprung up a more structured, collective approach to looking after young children: the traditional day care centres supervised by recognized members of the community that began to appear at the time of independence. According to Tall (1995), *"It was during the winter season of 1962 that, having to work long hours in the rice fields, the women in Tendième, near Bignona, invented a seasonal day care centre for their children. The centre used the premises of the rural community centre, the responsibility of the then Secretariat of State for Social Development. The community centre's female staff provided technical advice, but the peasant women themselves handled the organisational side. The idea spread, and by 1975 the rural areas of Casamance were home to 56 such centres. Today there are a hundred or so of them, built of local materials – cob, stakes, cringing – and according to traditional techniques by the people who take care of their fitting out, upkeep and functioning. Some parents look after the children, others prepare the meals and the entire group contributes in money or in kind to providing the centre with food"*. Tall stresses the value of these approaches, whose management and functioning depend on the group in spite of the clear lacks in health and education terms: "(educated) *in, by*

and for their social circle, children found their place naturally and harmoniously". These forms of childcare were to be taken into consideration by the authorities when they began looking into the non-formal sector in the 1990s.

2.2.3. Pre-school education

The situation as described in 1999 revealed a severe shortage of the various infrastructures, their uneven distribution over the national territory, and a context of population increase (2.7%) unaccompanied by corresponding economic growth. The structures concerned represent three different sectors.

2.2.3.1. The formal sector

In 1998, only 2.7% of children were receiving pre-school education in the formal sector overseen by the Ministry of Education. This sector embraced public and private nursery schools and day care centres. These were open to children aged from 3 to 6 and functioned as a rule from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. As the State had created only nursery schools, the day care side was taken over by the private sector. All the establishments in question were heavily influenced by the French nursery school and French was the language used. Of the 394 establishments inventoried in 2000, only 37 were in rural areas. Half of all establishments are to be found in Dakar, and 74% of those belong to the private sector, described as being more expensive for parents.

The history of the formal sector is recent. The first pre-school establishments – which were private – date from the 1920s, and regulation came only in 1960. The first public nursery school opened in 1965. It was only with the 1971 Outline Act that pre-school education became part of the education system; and it was not until the 1991 Outline Act that it was provided with a clear set of aims. Concern with harmonisation of the private and public sectors began to emerge in the mid-1980s.

Nursery school staff – called "pre-school educators" – have two years' tertiary education acquired at the Teacher Training College (EFI). Originally specifically designed for them, this training is now the same as for primary school teachers. Like those of primary teachers, salaries of pre-school educators seem appropriate. The staff of private nursery schools are less well qualified, while in day care centres qualifications are limited or non-existent.

The few establishments taking in well-off urban children are now increasingly rejected, for several reasons: many families find the cost too high; the schools are too far away and ferrying children to and fro is a problem; the French model is being criticized; and there is a growing demand for religious education.

2.2.3.2. The "informal" sector

The "informal" sector, as it is termed in Senegal, is that of the Koranic schools, or *daaras*. The popularity of these structures can be explained by the level of demand for religious education, but also by their low cost. The exact extent of the sector is not known, but it is considered to be substantial and multi-faceted (Diouf, Mbaye & Nachtman, 2001). As several reports indicate, it represents something of a problem for the authorities, given a recent phenomenon involving the young children who attend the establishments in question: the begging I myself witnessed in the streets of Dakar, and the outright abandonment of some pupils by their poor families.

The decision taken to include religion in education is readily understandable. This so-called "contingency" strategy testifies to a general quest for identity in a context in which marked religious pressures, notably from the Mourid Brotherhood, are evident at all levels.

2.2.3.3. The non-formal sector

This sector involves the structures developed by NGO-supported community organisations to make it easier for mothers to work. They show a degree of variation in their functioning, organisation, type of personnel, wages, and age of children accepted, but have common features that distinguish them from formal structures: (1) a dual mother-child focus; (2) community roots; (3) use of local languages. Now extending to more children than the formal sector (8.1%), they first attracted the attention from the Ministry of the Family and the Ministry of Education in the mid-1990s. Of the examples that follow, some are to be considered for the tests planned as part of the PDEF's DIPE; this justifies taking a closer look at them.

- The educational and health community day care centres run by the Support Project for Women's Advancement Groups (PAGF)

At the 1995 Seminar in Kolda, organised by the Ministry of the Family within the framework of PAGF, there was emphasis on the potential represented by the day care centres set up by women's groups. The idea of combining the educational and health aspects came a year later with the *Programme for Community Pre-school Education in Senegal*, drawn up by the Ministry of Education's DEPEE and to be jointly managed with the Ministry of the Family. It was planned at the time to set up 1,000 day care centres of this type in the 10 regions, and the idea of toy-making workshops was also raised. The planned strategy involved: increased awareness for women's advancement groups; use of volunteers; forging of partnerships; financing of community day care centres; establishment of national, regional, departmental and local coordination units; a contract between local operators and the coordination units; use of simple, inexpensive approaches; and monitoring and assessment by the two ministries concerned.

This model, intended for children aged 3 to 6, provided for: appropriate equipment; strong parental involvement; use of "auxiliaries" or "mother-assistants" (volunteers, where possible literate in French or the local language and trained by an interdisciplinary team); supervision by pre-school inspectors at *département* level; and implementation by local operators. The educational model was that of the nursery school with, in addition, health, nutrition and religious inputs. The centres were organised according to age-group – young, intermediate and older – with a "nursery assistant", trained by the inspectors within the framework of the PAGF, acting as director. The centres were managed by committees made up of members of the community, and the monthly parental contribution varied from 1,500 to 2,500 CFA. Training of "monitors" was the director's responsibility.

A 1998 inventory listed 152 centres of this type, offering places to 4,208 children. Parental interest was keen, but the balance sheet drawn up in 2001 identified the following difficulties: lack of coordination, insufficient staff guidance and monitoring by inspectors, cramped premises, inadequate use of teaching materials, and a gradual break with a truly communitarian model because of increasingly heavy costs to be borne by parents. In spite of its weaknesses, however, the PAGF centres model remains a source of hope, and this is why it has been included among the models to be tested in the PDEF's DIPE programme.

- The Organisation-Reconstruction-Work / Health-Education-Nutrition (ORT / SEN) day care centres

The year 1996 also saw the appearance of the centres begun by this Geneva-based NGO as part of a fixed-term project (1996-2000). In this case, units were set up in several municipalities in the Dakar *département*, with a view to offering children aged 3-6 a nursery-school type of pre-schooling, providing health checks and disease prevention measures, lightening the mothers' workload and promoting the day care approach. These units were two-part – one for small children, in Wolof and the other for older ones, in French – and used land provided by the municipality. Some of them had very

up-to-date equipment supplied especially for the project. Staff – voluntary workers chosen by the community – were recruited from among persons holding either the *baccalauréat* or a lower secondary studies diploma, paid by the municipality and helped by nursery assistants and support personnel. The women directors were pre-school educators given an additional six weeks' training by inspectors from the National Education Authority. Coordination was in the hands of a retired inspector. Parental contribution was 3,000 CFA per child per month. A scheme for ensuring continuation of the project involved training 500 women, creating management committees and provision of training for young people, an infirmary open to all, and chat sessions.

As things now stand, eight of the 10 planned units are in operation, with 1,200 children attending. While stressing the interest of the model, reports also emphasise its weaknesses: understaffing, costs too high for parents, pay problems due to municipal budget shortfalls, failure to apply fully the agreement on education between ORT/SEN, the Ministry of Education and the municipalities, and non-functioning of nutrition activities. It was concluded that the model cannot be generally introduced and so it was abandoned.

- Early childhood community awareness centres

This is another innovative measure designed by DEPEE and implemented in conjunction with the NGO Plan International. The awareness centres aim to create a fulfilment-oriented setting for children aged 3-6, provide basic education appropriate to their social values, offer religious education and ensure health and nutrition monitoring. The criteria for establishing such a centre are: a primary school close to hand, a source of running water and a community capable of providing "mother-educators". Staffing is by volunteers who have finished primary school: these women are literate in the local language, married and living in the village. They undergo two weeks' initial training with inspectors and nutritionists. Monthly parental contributions of 250-1,000 CFA make up for staff's loss of income from other work. The community provides the premises.

This community programme experienced difficulties related to a late start, and according to the 2001 evaluation the centres functioned badly throughout the year. Not all the planned facets – health, nutrition, religion – were implemented. The training turned out to be inadequate, as were supervision and teaching aids. However, mention was made of popular enthusiasm for the idea and of the commitment of the staff in spite of the level of remuneration – although the salary problem did arise, along with that of the project's continuation and appropriation by the communities concerned. Given the inadequacy of state subsidies, solutions capable of generating income have been looked into, among them sinking wells and setting up of a millet mill. Meanwhile the experiment continues.

- Community Nutrition Centres (CNC)

These centres were set up in disadvantaged areas as venues for health and nutrition education. Mothers whose children had been helped in this way have created day care centres and recruited unemployed pre-school educators and religious teachers, costs being covered by parental contributions. Currently, 117 such centres are in operation, with 5,075 children in attendance. Studies indicate a significant reduction in problems of underweight, and the provision of wells and latrines, while at the same time pointing out insufficiencies in terms of premises, teacher training and materials. This community-based structure will be taken into account in the testing of the PDEF's DIPE programme.

2.3. Conclusion

In the course of the 1990s, then, early childhood was by no means ignored. Worth mentioning are the attention given to the non-formal sector and the community approach, together with experiments seeking to incorporate educational and health

aspects. However, the measures taken by the two ministries failed to come to grips with the essentials: insufficient focus on pre-schooling, lack of political will, absence of support and coordination, insufficient commitment by actors – all these factors contributed to the prevailing situation.

Thus it was in a spirit both of continuity and of a break with the past that the new Government took steps to save the early childhood sector from the "oblivion" to which it had been consigned. In a favourable international and regional context, the integration option sits well with the possibilities revealed by the initial community experiments outlined above, but the freshness of the new policy resides in its ambition and its choice of the distinctive children's hut model.

3. Administrative integration

Once the responsibility of different ministries, early childhood has now been given a profile of its own by the creation of a specific new ministry. To establish the reasons for this, I shall begin by examining the way the Ministry of the Family and Early Childhood (MFPE) took shape, before considering its make-up, resources and functioning, and assessing their appropriateness to the ministry's tasks.

3.1. A new ministry takes shape

At the Council of Ministers held on 11 May 2000, the newly elected President Wade asked the Minister for Education, until then in charge of pre-school education, to *"launch without delay the pre-school education operation by drawing up a comprehensive project for the entire country, department by department"* (*Le Soleil*, 18 May 2000). However, a few months later the early childhood portfolio was entrusted to a minister with responsibility therefore, appointed in November 2000 to the Ministry for the Family, Social Action and National Solidarity (MFASSN); the minister was then designated head of an autonomous ministry, the MFPE, in April 2001.

The new ministry comprises sections taken from the Ministry of Education and the MFASSN. Thus the former found itself separated from its Pre-school Education Division – in charge of the 3-6 age bracket at the DEPEE – which was then abolished, while the latter lost its Family branch. Apparently, the removal of early childhood from the Ministry of Education and its association with the family section in the new ministry was intended to bolster an approach based on the Rights of the Child and combining care of young children with that of their families. At the same time, the innovative children's huts model was promoted by the addition of an MFPE component. Together with these two sections there exists a third, more specifically devoted to the children's huts programme.

Accompanied by an increase in funding for the early childhood sector, this measure was not, it seems, well received by either of the truncated ministries. In respect of the Ministry of Education, it is known that the teachers' unions continue to demand a full ministry covering early childhood, primary, middle and secondary school, literacy, national languages and higher education. At the MFASSN, I imagine, the separation was seen as a dismantling operation. At the same time, within the MFPE and among education system actors, not everyone is entirely convinced that early childhood, cut off from the Ministry of Education in this way, is really going to benefit in educational terms.

In the course of the ministerial transfers in 2000-2001, some of the measures affecting pre-schooling were interrupted, slowed or re-oriented. The new curriculum, halted in its provisional October 1999 version, has been taken up again as part of a new vision. The efforts going into the Ten-Year Education and Training Plan (PDEF) continue, but under different administrative supervision. Launched by the Ministry of Education, the guidelines for PDEF's DIPE programme and its model-testing project were reworked by the staff of the Minister responsible at the MFASSN (*Proposals for preparation of a single procedures manual for the ten-year programme for the PDEF-*

DIPE integrated early childhood development programme, version dated 27 February 2001), then at the MFPE (*Procedures manual for integrated early childhood development*, November 2001).

This coincided with preparation of the framework document for the new policy, the aim being to generate impetus at inter-ministerial and partnership level. Initiated by two specialist advisers and the PDEF coordinator (August 2001 version), the document was circulated in-house via a validation workshop involving all MFPE departments and executive staff (December 2001 version), then discussed during a presentation session (early January 2002) attended by all partners; reactions and proposals were included in the final version of February 2002.

According to this most recent version, the new minister's mission is *"to implement the policy laid down by the Head of Government in the fields of improvement of family living conditions, defence of women's rights, economic and social promotion of women, protection of children's rights, and implementation and monitoring of the policy of pre-school education and integration of young children into family and social life"* (Strategic policy paper, p. 16).

3.2. Ministry of the Family and Early Childhood (MFPE): Composition

The MFPE comprises a team of advisers, three departments and other specialist services whose composition has not yet been decided. The Minister, a teacher of family economics, was on the staff of the former Ministry of the Family and contributed to inter-ministerial efforts on early childhood in the late 1990s. As mentioned above, the components of the new ministry derive mainly from the other two ministries, but also include staff with experience in the field and in the private sector.

3.2.1. Department of Early Childhood and the Rights of the Child (DPE-DE)

This department, whose head is a civil servant with experience in community development, has fifteen staff. With its four divisions – (1) Infrastructures and Amenities; (2) Studies, Planning and Monitoring; (3) Coordination; (4) Rights of the Child – it is in charge of the children's huts building programme and promotion of the Rights of the Child. Two jurists are currently being engaged to draw up a *Code of the Child*.

More especially charged with handling the presidential project, this department is focused on communication (the media, etc.), mobilisation (assistance to the community), generating awareness (among shapers of opinion, religious figures, public personalities, partners, decision-makers, clubs, NGOs, financial backers, etc.) and the circulation of information via all possible channels that it is now undertaking throughout the country, one example being T-shirts showing a children's hut for "Early Childhood Week". It does not deal with the educational aspect of the huts, which is the responsibility of another department.

3.2.2. The Pre-school Education Department (DPES)

The nucleus of this department is the Pre-school Education Division of the former DEPEE. Its woman head, also from the DEPEE, has been involved since 1995 in community day-care projects and created the first inter-ministerial committee, mentioned above. This department currently has 13 staff members, most of them former pre-school educators. More especially charged with the educational aspect throughout the sector – at public, private and community levels – it is in charge of promoting a comprehensive approach to early childhood in nursery schools, day-care centres and the children's huts, open to children aged 0-6.

With its four divisions under the supervision of inspectors – (1) Syllabuses, Training and Educational Equipment; (2) Studies and Planning; (3) Communication and Relationships with Partners; (4) Private Education (including Studies and Statistics sections) – it is also responsible for the new curriculum, which is to include the health

and nutrition segments. It is currently preparing memoranda on the allocation of responsibilities and the terms of reference for producing guides for new early childhood personnel: health and nutrition, HIV/AIDS, civic and environmental education. It is also in charge of teaching equipment.

3.2.3. The Family Department (DF)

Drawn from the former MFASSN, this department has fifteen staff and is headed by a jurist recruited from the private sector. It has five divisions: (1) Sociocultural Development and Legal Assistance for Children; (2) Economic Advancement for Families; (3) Communication; (4) Planning, Research and Training; (5) Women.

Its role is cross-cutting. According to the framework document, it is *"charged with improving families' social, economic and cultural conditions. This means it is responsible for ensuring the promotion and protection of women's rights, in particular by supervising the creation of the Rights of Women and Girls Unit. It also implements the policy of gender equity and equality and ensures economic advancement for women by setting up support mechanisms for women's organisations. In this way it contributes to the policy of promotion, protection and enforcement of the rights of the child"* (2002, p. 17).

3.2.4. Other specialist services

The MFPE is also home to a number of specialist services: the National Centre for Documentation and Information for Women, the Gender and Development Project, the Project against the Worst Forms of Child Labour, the Project for Loans to Women, and coordination of the Ten-Year Education and Training Programme (PDEF). I was not able to obtain full information on these services. Some of them seem problematical: there are challenges, for example, to the right of the Project against the Worst Forms of Child Labour to be part of this ministry.

3.2.5. Departmental advisory staff

In hierarchical order, the group of departmental advisers comprises: (1) the head, a jurist from the private sector; (2) the first specialist adviser, a former teacher of family economics, recruited from the Ministry of Education's National Institute for Study and Action for the Development of Education (INEADE) and replacing the preceding first adviser, now in charge of the Project against the Worst Forms of Child Labour; and (3) the second specialist adviser, from the cultural sphere. The six other specialist advisers are to be found in the Communication and Computer Science Unit and the Planning, Coordination and Programme Monitoring Unit; they notably include a specialist (also from INEADE) in charge of educational equipment and multimedia and two nutrition specialists.

Conspicuous by their absence are health specialists, both on the advisory team and in the Departments.

3.3. Decentralized departments

3.3.1. Regional and county departments and their partners

The documents make provision for coordination by regional and county departments of local implementation of programmes as laid down at central level by the MFPE. These decentralized departments are intended to provide programme monitoring and evaluation, educational guidance for staff and structures, and guidance for families and groups. They do not yet exist as such, but their financing appears in the 2002 budget.

These departments' partners are, firstly, local government bodies – municipalities and rural communities – charged with bolstering the early childhood programme via social mobilisation, locating resources and allocating loans; and, secondly, civil society: NGOs, women's organisations, grass-roots community organisations. Their

involvement is vital in terms of resources, specialist and financial backing and assistance in ensuring sustainability. Programme beneficiaries are also termed partners.

3.3.2. A new role for pre-school inspectors

Pre-school inspectors – of whom there are currently 22 – have been informed of their future role in the process of setting up early childhood departments at county and regional level. During my visit, they were brought together at the Ministry for a meeting at which they were to be made responsible for local development of ministerial policy, in association with its three departments. Further training is planned for them in respect of the integrated approach and they are to be given additional information on health and nutrition. They are also to take part in discussions on the links between pre-school and primary school.

These inspectors, now paid out of the MFPE budget, are widely considered the best qualified to carry out the tasks in question, given their previous experience – and in most cases specialized training – as pre-school educators. This means extra skills for the early childhood sector, now suffering from the shift to standard training for all. While versatility – the combination of pre-school and primary school skills – is not to be underestimated, many observers emphasise a loss of capacity in, for example, the making of pre-school educational equipment and use of local resources.

3.4. The budget

Is available financial support appropriate to the huge task in hand? I had great difficulty in obtaining the new ministry's exact budget and the comparative data needed to measure its scope. Although established in 2001, the MFPE had no separate budget during that year. The budget for 2002 will be 3,079,637,000 CFA. To the Ministry's astonishment this budget, seen as substantial by those concerned, was approved by Parliament without discussion. This fits with the shared opinion that spending – given excessive inputs for what is seen as ineffective higher education – should be re-focused on basic education, including early childhood.

On a scale defying all comparison with that of the Ministry of Education, this budget is presented as being far larger than that of the former Pre-school Education Division. It is to be distributed to the three departments as follows:

	Staff	Running costs
DPE-PE	23 304 000 CFA	82 865 000 CFA
DF	41 255 000 CFA	27 555 000 CFA
DPES	38 819 000 CFA	52 240 000 CFA

The huts programme clearly receives a strong support:

Nursery schools	Staff - equipment ?	105 545 000 CFA
Huts	Construction Equipment	800 000 000 CFA 200 000 000 CFA

The decentralised departments appear in the budget, an indication that their establishment is imminent:

Regional departments	106 500 000 CFA
County departments	148 502 000 CFA

3.5. Coordination

3.5.1. Relations between politicians and specialists

At the MFPE relations between politicians and specialist staff are described as satisfactory. Commitment by the President, notably through his many trips abroad, is seen as something very positive. The highly political nature of the direction early childhood development is taking is acknowledged, but while the children's huts programme certainly puts presidential action in the spotlight, nobody questions the genuineness of the head of state's concern for young children, a concern all those I questioned described as sincere and longstanding.

In practical terms, specialist memoranda are sent out to draw attention, for example, to aspects of the organisation of the children's huts that are inappropriate and need to be corrected. At this moment there currently appears to be no challenging of the hut notion and its basic characteristics. We cannot, however, foresee the outcome of this initial project, considering the possible difficulties of partnerships and the sector deregulation that is at present being advocated.

3.5.2. Intra-ministerial coordination

While certain links within the MFPE seem well established – probably because of the shared background of some staff members – others, particularly with the Department of the Family (DF), seem to me still ill defined. There is a unanimous desire for increased coordination, and to this end a Programme Planning, Coordination and Monitoring Unit has been set up within the advisory team, the intention being to foreground the work being done in the various ministerial sectors and bring these efforts into synergy.

For the moment, intra-ministerial coordination depends solely on the weekly "coordination meeting" between the three department heads and the Minister, who uses it as the basis for her work in the Council of Ministers. This arrangement is seen as a markedly inadequate way of interconnecting the various projects, and it is planned to hold "thematic work sessions" on concrete projects with the relevant persons from the various sections of the ministry. At present, the other sections seem poorly acquainted with the DF's projects. Also planned for the future are "work in progress evaluation sessions" and "annual appraisal sessions" relating to the Three-Year Action Plan that was being drawn up during my visit.

What is needed, then, is better, more structured coordination – with, as some point out, fewer meetings. Currently the various projects are going ahead and certain urgent needs are emerging, notably regarding progress in building the children's huts.

3.5.3. Inter-ministerial coordination

Inter-ministerial coordination takes place through mechanisms called "strategic discussion groups" or "multi-sector committees", functioning on an ad hoc basis to back initial decisions and draw up the first policy documents: the "national multi-sector committee" set up for a recent cooperation project with Japan, for example, only foreshadows the real committee, which is not yet functioning. Although he is regularly consulted, the Health representative, a nutritionist and paediatrician, has not yet had his status officially validated by a memorandum from the Ministry of Health, although I was told this was shortly to be done. In addition, at department and specialist service level not all the multi-sector committees, set up to deal with various aspects of policy and involving different partners, are functioning yet, for such reasons as projects' still being at the embryonic stage, administrative inertia, delays at the World Bank and so on. This continuing instability seems to me to indicate a hesitation between a single mechanism and the ad hoc versions that have prevailed up to the present. A clear choice between the two – the first approach plus a system of delegation for specific operations, for example – would lead, in my opinion, to greater consistency and efficacy.

The main ministries concerned – Education, Justice, Health and Disease Prevention, Culture and Communication, Finance, Literacy, National Languages,

Technical Education and Vocational Training, Youth, Environment and Public Hygiene, etc. – are represented in this multi-sector approach, and at the MFPE relations are described as good. Yet it remains difficult to say, at the moment, just how and to what extent they contribute to a truly integrated approach. Certain departments at the Ministry of Education seem heavily involved; INEADE, for example, takes an active part in discussion of the basic documents relating to the new policy and is impatient for requests for concrete cooperation in implementing it. The Department of Educational Planning and Reform (DEPREE) seems just as vital in respect of the major issue of the interface between early childhood and primary school: most teachers feel that children with the pre-school training provided up until now arrived at school ill-prepared. Involvement by this Department needs to be developed. As to the other ministries, I lack the information needed to provide details of their current engagement. Ministry of Health commitment seems to me open to doubt.

Be that as it may, present inter-ministerial coordination structures appear inadequate in the context of a supposedly integrated policy. The mechanisms in question need rapid enhancement and must function with regularity and precision.

3.6. Conclusion

At first sight, the presence of people from different cultural backgrounds would appear to be an asset for a ministry seeking to develop an integrated early childhood policy; and even more so in that some of those concerned have been involved in previous inter-ministerial approaches.

However, representation of the health sector in MFPE seems to me surprisingly limited in the light of a policy that stresses the need to incorporate this aspect.

Moreover, under the present circumstances, the internal coordination mechanisms do not yet allow for the cross-referencing needed to carry out the planned goals, especially since the division into three of what is already a bipolar ministry hardly seems conducive to an integrated policy. While it is true that it highlights the children's hut innovation with a department devoted to its implementation, one wonders about the balance between the two poles. Does not the presence of two departments for children – DPEDE and DPES – weaken the connection with the one relating to the family (DF)? Despite a seemingly clear distribution of tasks for each, ambiguities and overlaps exist – between the two child-based departments and the family-based one – and these call for more structured internal coordination mechanisms.

The integrated approach to early childhood having led to certain ministries' being amputated, coordination with those ministries needs to be enhanced in the interests of educational continuity with primary school, of placing measures relating to women and the family in a broader social context, and of effectively integrating the nutritional and health segments. The working relationship between the various multi-sector committees, even if their work enabled preparation of the initial documents for the new policy, is far from clear. Rapid choices have to be made regarding more consistent, more effective mechanisms.

Are the financial resources provided adequate? Probably not in the light of the stated ambitions, but the extent of the effort being made should be emphasized: the 2002 budget reveals a clear increase in public allocations for young children. Also worth noting is the sector's apparent popularity, as indicated by the absence of debate on the budget in Parliament.

4. The new policy and its implementation

I shall now provide a critical outline of MFPE choices, based on the final version of the framework document on current early childhood policy (Strategic Policy Paper, 2002) and on what has been achieved up until the present. I shall begin by examining the

rationale and the goals of the new policy, its principles and strategies, and then, in more detail, the children's hut model.

4.1. Reasons and goals

Against the background of scientific research demonstrating the importance of the first years of life for the child's development and lifelong learning skills, the difficult living and educational conditions experienced by Senegalese children are openly acknowledged. There is expression of an official determination to improve their situation and, by extension, that of their family circle, with a view to development for all.

4.1.1. Acknowledgement of a critical situation

The framework document takes up and reinforces the case put forward in earlier Early Childhood Development documents, acknowledging that Senegal is going through a period of profound change accompanied by the emergence of new needs, imbalances and losses of ground. It reaffirms the fact that the effects of rapid urbanisation, abrupt culture shocks and the disappearance of family solidarity are most immediately felt by young children. These latter are described as victims of the economic, nutritional and environmental crisis.

As regards health, nutrition and education, the updated inventory is a powerful argument in favour of the new policy. It highlights the still critical situation regarding health and nutrition for young children, denouncing once more the shortages, inequalities and glaring disparities in the pre-school field and stressing the gap between the proposed structures and families' everyday circumstances and cultural requirements. This situation is held responsible for children's suffering and their later learning difficulties. Also acknowledged are the tremendous needs in terms of educating children and instructing families, and the fact that the most deprived sectors are rural and outer urban areas and children in the 0-3 age bracket. The problem of the financial cost for families is raised, together with that of begging by children from the *daaras*. The French nursery school model is challenged and attention paid to the call for early religious education and the importance of pre-school education in the mother tongue.

In its insistence on the Rights of the Child, the framework document homes in on the continuing disparity between what is said and what is done. Four indicators are cited here: (1) inadequate registration of births: only 61% of children under 5 were registered at birth, with a greater proportion in urban areas (79.6%) than in the countryside (46.4%); (2) the high proportion of orphans or adopted children: 68% of children under 15 live with their parents, 7.6% live with neither parent (4.4% for the 0-4 age bracket), and 5.8% of children have lost one or both parents; (3) the high proportion of children working: 37.6% of children aged 5-15 (39% for boys, 36% for girls; 43.5% in rural areas, 27.7% in the cities): and (4) insufficient knowledge of the Rights of the Child: in 2000, 44% of households knew of the Rights of the Child, an improvement on the 33% observed in 1996 (55% in the cities and 36% in rural areas). Other indicators could be looked at, among them the question of infanticide, which certain MFPE staff members wish to see examined.

4.1.2. Improvement of children's circumstances and environment and the society in which they live

Faced with this situation ten years after the signing of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Declaration on Education for All, the new policy sets out to improve young children's living and educational conditions significantly and, by using early childhood as a lever, to bring similar improvements to families, communities and society at large. Thus the new policy fits with broad economic and societal aims. *"By investing in early childhood, Senegal can look forward to a highly skilled, well educated population as the basis of a prosperous economy and a true democracy"* (p. 13).

Girls and women are a particular point of focus: increased schooling for girls, hampered as they are by having to look after younger children, is being actively sought, as is, by extension, greater equality between the sexes. The same is true of freedom and increased economic participation for women. The policy likewise aims at instruction for the entire community by means of educational and health measures targeting young children, instruction here being also intended to boost health and nutrition levels for the family group and the community. A further goal, according to the documents, is to enrich the child's family and community circle by teaching games.

As far as young children themselves are concerned, both quantitative and qualitative goals are being proposed, for their immediate welfare but also with a view to improved readiness for primary school. This involves protection of and education for all young children, with special attention to the most disadvantaged. A further proposal focuses on an integrated approach meeting all of children's diverse needs. *"For the Government of Senegal, integrated early childhood development is now an education policy priority. To improve this sector, the State plans firstly to raise the pre-school attendance rate to 30% by 2010 and secondly to promote the quality of early childhood services by diversifying them in a way calculated to establish a cluster incorporating the educational, health and nutrition segments"* (pp. 32-33).

4.2. Principles and strategies

In order for these goals to be met, the principles outlined imply a holistic, community-based approach focused on the Rights of the Child. They thus give direction to the strategic choices of a policy founded on partnership and allowing for a possible deregulation of the sector.

4.2.1. The integrated approach

4.2.1.1. An approach based on the Rights of the Child

Drawing on resolutions resulting from the ratification of conventions on childhood, the approach adopted compels the State and its partners to accept responsibility for increasing both health protection for young children and access to early childhood structures and thus attacking the inequalities, examples of injustice and disparities that characterise the present situation. In recognising the family as the primary focus of education for the child, the State affirms its obligation to guarantee the protection of the family circle. This kind of approach justifies combining the family and early childhood poles within a single ministry, and legitimises the drafting of a *Code of the Child*.

4.2.1.2. A holistic approach

In contrast with the compartmentalisation of classic pre-school programmes?, this approach integrates and promotes the child's various needs and thus has to take the form of the "cluster of services" mentioned in earlier texts and detailed here. In health terms, early childhood programmes have to be provided with medical cares and multi-skilled personnel capable of identifying and treating a whole set of deficiencies and disturbances in children, while also informing and training mothers. In nutritional terms, the task is to prepare a multi-faceted programme including enriched meals for children, training for mothers, small-scale farming and animal husbandry, and nutritional monitoring. In educational terms there must be promotion of early learning activities – creativity, socialisation, openness to technology – and cultural activities: transmission of traditional values, religious education.

The holistic approach must thus be integrated into the future curriculum. Entrusted to the Pre-school Education Division (DEPS), the curriculum *"must promote integrated and harmonious development for the child aged 0-6 years through the creation of an environment conducive to its affective, psychomotor, health and nutritional fulfilment"* (p. 33). A recent document proposes, for the time being, teaching activities involving games in the logico-mathematical, perceptual-motor, language-based, dexterity, social awareness, and scientific and technological manipulation and

initiation categories. But what of the other aspects? Without health specialists to make their contribution, one wonders just what the health and nutrition sections of the curriculum actually count for.

A *Skills Checklist* for the new profession of early childhood guidance is also in preparation at the DEPS. With regard to education, eleven basic skills are listed: *"Drawing up a programme linked with the curriculum for a set period"; "practical and educational organisation of a DIPE structure, with identification and integration of children's needs on the basis of an integrative, differentiated approach"; "preparation and implementation of teaching/learning situations in DIPE structures whatever the activity and the level"; "making teaching equipment out of local materials"; "designing evaluation tools and strategies"; "preparing new technology initiation sessions with a view to more effective use of toy and games libraries"; "carrying out research aimed at resolving a local problem"; "reading and writing at least one of the local languages and organizing literacy classes"; and "drawing up a school project". In respect of training in promotion of the Rights of the Child and social values, three skills are called for: "Drawing up an awareness and popularisation strategy for the principal rights of the child"; "designing an information and awareness plan on the need to draw on the cultural heritage for education in values"; and "preparing a social mobilisation plan for solving an environment and population-related problem".* With reference to health and nutrition training, three further skills are listed: *"Developing awareness activities relating to breastfeeding, prevention of childhood diseases and HIV/AIDS"; "implementing awareness campaigns, action to prevent certain nutritional deficiencies, and early detection of deficiencies hampering normal development of the child"; and "promoting a healthy, balanced diet using local produce".*

The question is whether or not the educators' level of training will allow effective development of all these skills and whether or not the necessary tools will be available. A new curriculum-linked training scheme is planned in two possible versions: *"Either using the cascade system covering education of training staff through to training of basic actors, or in multi-function teacher-training centres with enhancement in the health and nutrition fields"* (p. 35). Retraining in the health and nutrition aspects is planned for inspectors and pre-school educators, together with continuing education mechanisms involving the building of regional resource centres. However, none of this actually exists at the moment and, given the urgency of the situation, the choice is going to utilisation of such existing resources as training centres for teachers and family economics workers, etc. There is reason to think that the programme will get under way using the means ready to hand, while awaiting creation of specific training structures. But can a genuinely holistic approach develop in such a context?

Nonetheless, the initial impetus is present. Guidelines for the new educators are being drawn up at the DEPS, several preparatory documents having already been produced in 2001: *Terms of reference for production of a guide to civic and environmental education; Terms of reference for production of a health and nutrition guide for early childhood educators; and Terms of reference for preparation of a methodological guide on HIV/AIDS designed for personnel of welfare structures for children aged 5-6.* A manual on how to make teaching materials is also in preparation.

4.2.1.3. A community-based approach

This kind of approach is justified by the recognition of the family and the community as "the natural context for the young child" and by the need for efficacy. As the documents put it, a community-based approach requires involvement by parents and the community in the preparation, implementation, management and evaluation of the resultant structures and measures, with training being essential to ensuring the continuity of those measures. It also requires that local people be available to coordinate the structures and set up local management committees. The Early Childhood and Rights of the Child Department (DPE-DE) is undertaking a range of field measures, but it is too soon to evaluate their impact.

This approach makes best use of local human resources, with in-community recruitment of staff for the children's huts intended to generate appropriation of the new structure. Further features are utilisation of local assets – ignored in the adoption of Western models – by encouraging the use of traditional games and the cultural heritage, and mobilisation of local resources using oral, written and religious traditions. Use of the skills and lore of grandparents, working alongside the hut personnel, was mentioned in the initial presentations of the hut approach and is reaffirmed in the framework document. Recruitment of staff seems to be presenting no great difficulty at the moment, but it is not easy to evaluate the action taken in respect of grandparents.

As the huts are not yet operational, it is difficult to know just what form the community approach is going to take. As some observers assert, these structures will become what the communities make of them. Will this give rise to real diversity? And if so, will this diversity be enriching or simply a source of fresh disparities? What is required is an observation unit – a national resource centre, with local branches – and guidance measures. Regulatory mechanisms – positive discrimination, for example – need to be set up to reduce possible inequalities. Then there is the matter of salaries for hut personnel: the State plans to cover salaries for the first two years only, but will the communities then take over? Has the MFPE made sufficient allowance for financing income-generating projects? I see a need here for solid, contract-based arrangements if continuation of the programme is to be ensured.

4.2.2. Strategies

These consist mainly of a policy of communication, development of a partnership-based dynamic and deregulation of the sector.

4.2.2.1. Communication policy

The communication policy now being implemented is consistent with the scope of the project's aims, focusing on target populations, actors and the institutional and financial partners. This policy accompanies the building of the children's huts and necessarily involves preparation of a basic social communication strategy, supply of mass communication equipment, organisation of forums and increased awareness on the part of administrative authorities at local, national and international level. Many missions abroad and other measures have been undertaken with this in mind, as I myself have observed, but it remains to be seen if they will suffice to get the message across. At this point in time we cannot be sufficiently objective about current measures to assess their effectiveness properly.

4.2.2.2. Making partnerships work

Implicit in the holistic approach and clearly stated in the documents is a strategy of cooperation among the various early childhood sectors. Broad in scope, it necessitates the creation of multi-sector committees including the actors and their partners, both at national and decentralised level. Since the MFPE-steered committees include such backers as the World Bank and a range of international, national and foreign NGOs that fund various aspects of current programmes and projects, it seems inevitable that these bodies will have an influence on the concrete outcomes of the new policy. I shall take here the example of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

In the light of a study carried out a year ago in the two disadvantaged areas of Kaolak and Tambacounda, JICA intends to create four children's huts in 2002. When asked by the Senegalese Government to undertake the *Study for improvement of the early childhood environment in Senegal* (draft, January 2002), Japan entrusted the task to the Agency, in close association with the relevant Senegalese authorities. In contrast with other backers, who begin with the building process, the Japanese approach focuses initially on content and functioning. Thus the study draws on inspection of planned sites, with a view to defining the conditions for the creation of the huts, the activities to be undertaken with children – dance, singing, pottery, and also such traditional Japanese

practices as paper-folding and the making of small objects with natural materials, etc. – and workshops with the parents featuring, for example, cooking demonstrations. The information, collected on video in the course of the study, will soon be used in the training of hut personnel. Building will take only a few months, the idea being to build only what is strictly necessary. The Japanese huts are intended to be larger and less elaborate than those financed by other bodies, the architectural aspect having been reviewed with Japanese experts.

What will be the ultimate result of the measures taken by the different partners? While it is very likely that new models will be imported and will fit more or less well with the local culture, it is clear that expertise from elsewhere – successful experiments in nearby countries, new elements drawn from foreign cultural contexts but presenting common features, etc. – can also enrich the process. What appears to be at stake is the balance of power within the partnerships and the ability of the State to maintain overall consistency in respect of the chosen goals.

4.2.2.3. Deregulation

In the interests of broader access to early childhood facilities, the option is to deregulate the educational context so as to *"guarantee the right of private organisations, individuals, religious bodies, local government – in other words all parties having appropriate resources – to create and manage educational structures along their own lines while complying with current laws and regulations"* (p. 26). The private sector, much called upon within the free-market economic framework advocated by the new government, is beginning to make proposals for financing children's huts, and if it becomes involved it will certainly influence future concrete outcomes. However, while the sheer extent of present needs is a source of real pressure, we must not underestimate the negative consequences noted by many studies carried out in countries where this option has been taken up. After all, is not the "private" pre-school sector in Senegal generally described as being inferior to its public equivalent? In my opinion, the role of the State needs to be sufficiently maintained in terms of finance and pre-established mechanisms if the State is to come close to achieving its chosen goals.

4.2.2.4. An action research approach

Implementation of the new policy is part of a process labelled action research, the aim being to improve the initial integrated welfare outcomes in the light of results achieved "here and there". An evaluation mechanism is planned that will provide summaries and measurement of children's physical and intellectual process; the underlying principle here is appealing, but it remains to be seen whether or not the idea will be put into practice and what resources and tools will be provided. I am surprised that academic resources are not being used more: the framework document mentions resorting to consultancies, but why not develop partnerships with universities, call on specialists in the fields of health, nutrition, educational science, psychology, sociology, etc., call for tenders or nudge PhD grants – in Senegal and abroad – in this direction?

The action research approach is intended to be backed up by a computerised management process that will ensure monitoring of and consistency among the various measures planned for the country as a whole, while at the same time creating databases accessible on the Internet (MFPE Web pages). This is a highly relevant initiative that could be linked to other projects such as training. Several documents make reference to the lack of studies devoted to African children and their play, etc.; in fact many such studies are known to exist – they have been carried out in a disconnected way by American, French and other teams – and it should be possible to draw on them and produce summaries.

4.3. The children's hut

Within the context of the overall policy, the task is to promote the hut model. This necessitates a more detailed analysis of the programme and an assessment not only of

its feasibility, but also of its relevance to the aims put forward in the framework document.

4.3.1. Characteristics

The children's hut is, as pointed out in the title of the initial presentation document, *an idea launched by the President of the Republic of Senegal*. The approach advocated takes account of the complexity of the African situation and the tensions between tradition and modernity. It also acknowledges shortfalls and resources, taking a point of view that is simultaneously compensatory and identity-seeking, challenging Western approaches while at the same time drawing on them. At issue here is a *"point of community convergence"* intended to overcome the *"handicap"* of the young African children who, unlike their European or American counterparts, do not have, *"from their earliest years, toys specially designed to structure their intellect"*.

The hut offers three-pronged integrated early childhood support: (1) education: awareness and learning activities provided by trained personnel from the community, and traditional activities *"to help our children find real roots in our cultures and develop self-esteem"* with the help of the grandmothers; (2) health: with the help of staff trained to provide care and inform parents; and (3) nutrition: enriched meals for children and education of parents. The notion of *"added value"* arises here, in the form of the advancement of women (training, health, etc.), the elderly and the disabled (toy-making), and job creation.

The initial model provides for: (1) a group of 30 children; (2) a solidly constructed building; (3) several dedicated areas: games room, infirmary, toilets, dormitory, kitchen, outdoor area; (4) a team comprising a woman "monitor" who has obtained the baccalaureate, "assistant mothers" literate in the local language, and grandmothers. The monitor's salary – a third of that earned by pre-school educators – is guaranteed for the first two years, after which it is to be taken over by the communities and those benefiting from hut facilities.

The hut building programme is a directly presidential concern. The MFPE's task is to identify hut sites in the light of the criteria laid down in the documents (water supply, etc.), find and train the appropriate staff, decide on the equipment required and mobilise the community. The cost of a hut is considerable, being estimated at 18,200,000 CFA for the building, 4,060,000 CFA for equipment, 1,648,000 CFA for staff, 500,000 CFA for training, 1,000,000 CFA for monitoring and evaluation and 1,100,000 CFA for studies and reception of the building works. Finance is derived mainly from external sources and the search for funds is based on the idea predicting 28,000 huts by 2010.

4.3.2. Achievements (February 2002)

I am told that 79 huts have already been built. All are scheduled to become operational in the next few months, but none is actually functioning yet and only the model hut at Déni Biram Ndao has been fitted out. The existing huts are all situated in disadvantaged rural or outer urban areas, but the hinterland will gradually be catered for. As already mentioned, recruiting seems easy, with staff being found locally. Applicants can also register at the MFPE.

The December 2001 *Progress Report on the Children's Huts Construction and Coordination Programme* mentions three main building agencies: (1) the Agency for the Execution of Works in the General Interest, in charge of the three huts financed by UNESCO (construction only) and the State (equipment); (2) the State's Project for Construction of Administrative Buildings and Heritage Restoration, in charge of the 50 huts entirely financed by Taiwan; and (3) the Department of Construction and Housing, responsible for the 19 huts financed entirely by the State. Mention is made of a hut financed by the International Association for the Fight against Poverty and for Development (AIPED) and a number of others paid for by other such partners as JICA and local authorities in France. Other possible partners include Luxembourg's

International Cooperation Scheme, the Vivendi Group, the National Rural Infrastructures segment of the Support Programme for Municipalities (PACOM) and a number of donors in the private sector.

This report also mentions the following difficulties: finance for the 200 huts planned for 2002 is by no means certain; and lack of finance means that monitoring, awareness and social mobilisation activities are not carried out as they should be by the services concerned. The DPE-DE budget for 2002 is larger than that of the other departments, but will it be adequate? What are the external aid prospects? Will existing huts be able to function effectively? If so, how long will this take? Will the staff have been trained? All these questions are justified by the current state of affairs. Whatever the case, the excessive cost of each hut and disproportionate dependence on external aid can be seen as constraints making the programme's future hard to predict. Certain commentators have remarked that, in cases of extreme difficulty, the huts could be used as resource centres for other innovations.

4.3.3. A model in progress?

4.3.3.1. The initial model

The 50 huts financed by Taiwan are of the same type as the model hut at Déni Biram Ndao, in the Thiès area. This hut is set next-door to the primary school in a poor village with a large child population and matches the designs shown on the various documents, T-shirts, desk diaries, Internet site and so on: an impressive external metal structure plunges from its apex to an area equipped with swings and a slide. Along walls decorated with paintings of fruit and vegetables grow a few plants which the caretaker has trouble watering. The tall, circular building is surrounded by a footpath and contains a large games room whose high ceiling is hung with fabric; a mini-dormitory; a small kitchen and a small bathroom with two adult and two child toilets; and an infirmary with bed, table and medicine cabinet. The educational equipment in the games room comes mostly from an experiment carried out with a French supplier: plastic puzzles, logico-mathematical games made of cardboard, little plastic computers, various symbol-based games, and toys spread about on shelves, low tables and the floor.

Like most observers, I was struck by the contrast between the hut's architecture and building materials and those of the surrounding dwellings. The spaces do not seem functional in terms of size and distribution and are not appropriate to the numbers the hut is supposed to cater for. A single room for children aged 0-6 is not necessarily the most appropriate approach and there are not enough toilets. In addition this supposedly fully functional model hut has no internal water supply. The health room is very small and the mini-dormitory tiny. At first sight, computers seem totally out of place in such a setting.

4.3.3.2. Changes needed?

Practical trials quickly led to a planned increase in the hut's capacity. To back up the access for all idea, the new documents make provision for a rotation system (30-60-90), which will necessitate the presence of at least two so-called "coordinators", to avoid any confusion with the family economics monitors (*Technical memorandum on the training of children's hut coordinators*, January 2002).

Other modifications are appearing. JICA's criticisms regarding the building costs, the size and fitting-out of the indoor and outdoor facilities and the teaching equipment have already been mentioned, and coincide with those of the other funding agents, actors and observers I met. The 2002 framework document retains the idea of a solid building in compliance with the relevant standards. At present, the prototype design is still being followed, but the accounts collected indicate that minor alterations are planned or have already been effected. The main concern is to enlarge and rationalise the space, install movable partitions and improve the outdoor facilities, especially for the activities involving the grandmothers. The height of the hut would allow for the

creation of mezzanines and enlargement of the rest area. Some commentators question the usefulness of the metal structure – impressive and aesthetically pleasing, but costly – but its symbolic value is acknowledged; so instead of thinking in terms of getting rid of it, the idea is rather to reduce its size, which would save money and gain space.

There has also been much criticism of the age mix and the place of the youngest children. The classic division into young, middle and older sections has reappeared, alongside a continuing attachment to the time-honoured nursery school model. However, while it is clearly unrealistic to think in terms of large groups of children aged 0-6 profitably sharing the same room, the return to compartmentalisation by age could easily thwart integration. As integrated systems in use in Northern Europe have shown, mixed-age groups are not to be lightly dismissed: an arrangement using two groups (2-4 years and 4-6 years) could prove rewarding, as French experiments indicate, especially as children under the age of two are not the priority group for full-time care. This does not mean, however, that no consideration is given to their specific place within the system: they may, for instance, attend "baby clubs" while their mothers are involved in their training activities, as happens in certain "excellence centres" in England.

With regard to recruitment coordinators, it is planned to combine assessment of individual qualifications with the holding of a locally organised competitive examination. The Progress Report mentions the baccalaureate criterion as found in the initial documents, but it is the lower secondary studies diploma that appears in the final version of the framework document. Some observers feel that, if necessary, an even lower level should be accepted, the important thing being to get the huts, once built, functioning as quickly as possible. In my opinion, the primary consideration should be training: it is vital that the opening of huts should be accompanied by an appropriate level of on-the-spot training. Experiments already carried out in an action research-training context – in German-language crèches in Belgium (Pirard, 1997) and the Koranic *kouttabs* in Morocco (Bouzoubaa, 1997, 2000) – demonstrate this possibility.

As regards the equipment of the huts, the Progress Report and other documents mention the need to cut costs and to adopt a twofold approach. Together with the Western games and toys mentioned at the outset, there is the purchase of French equipment in the form of an educational games kit for the 79 children's huts and 95 other pre-school establishments. Most of these games are the same as those provided in the French pre-school system, with some of them adapted to the African cultural context. They are predominantly of the logico-mathematical type: language-based games have been avoided because of the current debate on national languages and the age at which French should be learnt. The kit comes with five new activity notebooks – logico-mathematical activities, handwriting and hygiene – jointly prepared by French and Senegalese experts and designed to establish the hut-family link.

At the same time there has been a decision to use local resources. The MFPE advisory team specialist in teaching materials and multimedia is currently undertaking a *Project for the creation of production units for specialised early childhood teaching materials for a decentralised context in Senegal* (July 2001). The firm aim here is to cut the cost of equipping the structures and thus make the access-for-all project more effective. Ultimately this will lead to the construction of a subregional training centre for production of teaching materials. Because of the notorious shortfall in this field, the production of these games and toys must, says the project document (p. 1) *"fit with a rationale of involvement and community mobilisation of all human and material resources, with national resources being given priority before they are supplemented by the expertise of international partners."* The aim is to emphasise women's organisations, clubs and associations, the disabled and publishers and printers, while at the same time developing a training network for production of these materials and expanding partnerships with international NGOs and foreign suppliers. The Mauritian experiment in the making of educational toys and the aid provided by that country for the creation of a production centre in Senegal are mentioned. The process of identifying local resources with a view to setting up these production units – a source of employment for women and young people – is now under way. This highly relevant project is only just beginning, but deserves to be followed closely.

A second project, an extension of the President's ideas on equipping the children's huts with computers, has been entrusted to the same specialist adviser. Its aim is a multimedia programme designed to use games for the development of new skills in young children and to contribute to local production of CD-ROMs. Various suppliers have provided CD-ROMs for testing and an action research strategy is planned for production of CD-ROMs appropriate to the Senegalese context. Here, too, a community-based approach will be adopted. The intention is to define content and ensure local production, with external technical assistance. At the next *World Summit for Children*, scheduled for New York in May, President Wade, in addition to making a personal gift, is to appeal officially to ministers, parliamentarians, women's groups, businessmen and communities. Contact has already been made with an American supplier. While it is true that computerisation needs to be pursued more vigorously by the ministry and its departments in the regions and counties, and by the future training and resource centres, it seems reasonable to question the relevance of computers for very young children. It should be pointed out that computers are far from being a pre-school priority in the developed countries, even in France, where nursery schools are heavily "primary-ised".

4.4. Conclusion

Thus the hut model is – with the integrated facilities in the day-care centres, the primary schools, the community nutrition centres and the toys and games library initiatives taken by the NGO CRESP (Centre for Religion, Ethics and Social Policy) – part of the five models to be tested within the framework of the Ten-Year Education and Training Plan (PDEF). Some observers fear bias within the testing process. For the time being, as already pointed out, nothing has actually got under way, the obstacle being the wait for a non-objection document from the World Bank; some see this as a sign of reservations on the part of the Bank, which does not finance the building of the huts. It is clear that the cost per hut is a problem and there is good reason to fear that it will seriously endanger the aim of putting the pre-school sector within everybody's reach.

I shall not go into detail concerning the aforementioned tension regarding the deregulation strategy, but there also remains the still unresolved problem of the discrepancy between the very real demands of the integration agenda and the inadequacy of the coordination mechanisms created.

However, I was struck by the dynamism of the people concerned, despite a restrictive context marked by time lags (between administrative slowness and the speed with which the first huts were built, to cite only one example); by the existence of certain resources which must be used to maximum effect; and by the first realistic adjustments regarding the hut and the business of equipping it: these indicate a greater concern with feasibility.

5. Conclusions

Given the recency of the new policy and the many imponderables to be taken into account, drawing conclusions at this point in its implementation is extremely risky. Rather than summing up the commentaries relating to the various points covered, I shall settle for a few closing observations, together with indications of the policy's main strengths and the difficulties it is encountering.

The new Senegalese policy as developed over the last few months extends and strengthens the case made by previous community-based experiments. Drawing on the potential of the non-formal sector, it sets out to resolve the problems formal and informal pre-school education is facing, together with the issues of health and nutrition care for children from the moment of birth. However, while the proposed model is a novel one and has to be developed on a very large scale, there can be no denying that the children's hut is at a considerable remove from the inexpensive, grassroots approaches tried out previously. Overall, the general aims of the policy fit with the

resolutions adopted at the Dakar Forum, but the model chosen does not necessarily seem the most relevant in terms of the declared ambitions regarding access and quality. Doubtless this model, which currently enjoys a certain popularity and sound political backing, will have to be modified in the light of various constraints.

The creation of a ministry specifically devoted to early childhood highlights the political choice that has given the sector priority status. The modest pre-school division at the Ministry of Education has now become a fully-fledged department in the new ministry, where it is directly linked to the family section. Thus, instead of a decision to enhance the pre-school sector within the Ministry of Education, a choice was made that reflects the community-approach option and a determination to develop a model separate from that of the nursery school. After a first, transitional year, early childhood now enjoys additional financial resources, but it is not certain that existing mechanisms will suffice to accomplish the sought-for integration, which requires close collaboration with other ministries, notably those of Education and Health. A very real impetus has been achieved, and demands increased support for and coordination of the work of those concerned. Among the positive features is the presence at the MFPE of people already involved in inter-ministerial approaches, well acquainted with the situation and actively advocating a pre-school agenda open to innovation. The diversity of backgrounds represented is a real asset, but it will take time for a new, shared vision to take shape. Particularly necessary is the possibility of regular meetings devoted to genuinely shared projects.

Many mechanisms are still lacking, among them those for guidance at national and local level. The pre-school inspectors might conceivably play a major part in the coming months, but for the moment the extent of their mobilisation is not easy to assess. Here, too, it will take time to build up the new professional skills inherent in the integrated approach. What exactly will the "multi-skilled educators" turn out to be? The initial group will have no choice but to begin with the means at hand, and we can only hope that training mechanisms will take shape rapidly. I have already referred to the doubts regarding salaries and the capacity of the municipalities and communities to take responsibility without firm contractual agreements with the State. The ambiguity in the documents between "doing things together" and "getting things done" results in the scale tipping towards the latter, and the resultant fears of State disengagement could undermine present and future efforts.

In a context characterized by economic difficulties, widespread administrative slowness and delays in the decentralisation process, is this ambitious project simply Utopian? Not necessarily, as long as its evolution is not excessively marked by dependence on external aid and sector deregulation; what is required is balanced joint construction backed by a process of authentic action research, self-assessment and critiques both in-house and drawing on other models tested in the region. Here, too, real State commitment is a necessity.

If the hut model develops significantly, will its influence spread to the other structures? How are the nursery schools and *daaras* going to react? It is too early to say, a range of scenarios being plausible according to the success or failure of the new project. The problem of standardisation, both of the sector and of its personnel, looms as large as ever: what is clear is that in the future, if integration-oriented training spreads beyond the hut context, the dual issue will arise of an umbrella term for the various early childhood personnel groups and of salary adjustments.

We cannot say what the future holds for this worthwhile policy, for we are dealing with a huge experimental field in which an ambitious, integration-oriented project is striving to take shape. Despite the difficulties of the context and the recent arrival of the project on a very complex scene, there exists an observable capacity for realistic, relevant changes of course that draw both on local assets – still insufficiently exploited, in my opinion – and external resources; one example is the twofold approach involving both purchase and manufacture of educational materials. The situation as I found it is one of vulnerability and, at the same time, hope for the future. The ongoing analysis required over the next few years should prove highly instructive for the country, the region and the world at large.

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